

Koriwn's *Life of Mashtots'*

[History of the Life and Death of our Venerable and Blessed *Vardapet* Mashtots',
Written in His Memory by our Translator *Vardapet* Koriwn]

Translated from Armenian
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Preface

by Manouk Abeghian

I.

I had been thinking of the God-given alphabet of the Azkanazian nation and of the land of Armenia—when, in what time, and through what kind of man that new divine gift had been bestowed, as well as the luminous learning and angelic, virtuous piety of the person, so as to cause memorials to blossom in an individual volume. And while I was striving to remember [the facts], there came the command of an excellent man named Hovsep, a disciple of that person, as well as the encouragement of others, our fellows of student days. Therefore, I, who had had the fortune of being [his] special pupil, even though the youngest [among his pupils], and the task beyond my capacities, [nevertheless] hastened to write without delay that which was suggested, compelled by the clear mandate which had been addressed to me. And we ask them all that they assist us in our tasks by their prayers, and to commit us to the divine grace, so that we may sail successfully and unerringly over the boundless waves of the sea of doctrine.

II.

But let me make an introductory statement whether it is permissible to write concerning the lives of men of perfection. We on our part do not wish to engage in disputatious eloquence, relying on our own thoughts; but through examples we simply wish to prove the contrary. For God the bountiful has been so gracious to His beloved as not only to deem them worthy of the splendid and high reward in endless eternity for their virtuous lives, but has caused them to be extolled to the heavens here in this world, in the course of this transitory life, so that they may in general shine with spiritual and earthly lustre.

And in the Mosaic story manifest is the nobility of blessed men and the firmness of [their] true faith, the beauty of godly and god-fearing life, and the radiance of a marvelous life. For one of them by virtue of acceptable sacrifice has been called just; another, because of his pleasing work, disdaining all-devouring death, has remained alive; a third, because of his perfect righteousness has been preserved in a ship for a period of one year on the god-sent scourge of a boundless, mountain-high sea, along with every breathing thing; a fourth, has been justified through [his] suddenly-found faith, and drawing nigh unto God, has become an oracle and ally of God and has inherited the promise of the bounties to come. Many others similarly have come to know God, and whose nobility all the divine books have described.

Similar to those I have mentioned, blessed Paul in his [epistle] to the Hebrews praises by name the true faith of such persons, whereby each one has received, according to his attainments, rewarding consolation from God the Bountiful, giver of all things. He even offers as an example the hospitality of Raab the evildoer [which she had shown] to the spies. However, upon noting how numerous such persons are, he actually has revealed the names of but a few of them, omitting others, deeming the time insufficient to recount them all in their proper order. He

then records in a general manner the tribulations of such persons and their martyrdom without resistance, which he considers preferable to all the wealth of the world.

Thus, all the inspired books have recorded the brave deeds of men of war; the victory of some, in accordance with the divine religion, the bravery of some in the course of encounters and wars, in the manner of the world, as those of Nimrod, Samson, and David. A few are praised, moreover, for their natural as well as godly intelligence, as that of Joseph, in Egypt, and Daniel, in Babylon. There were among them advisors to mighty kings, who indicated the state of worldly affairs, at the same time imparting knowledge to everyone concerning God, the Lord of all. In praise of the wisdom of such persons, the prophet himself states as follows: "Art thou wiser than Daniel; or were they wise councilors who have advised thee by their understanding." And this is not all, he extolls the power of the saints, by dispatching the angels as emissaries, who declared Daniel to be magnificent and the Holy Mother of the Lord, in Galilee, "blessed among women."

But what to say concerning the praise whereby comrades honored each other, whose nobility the Lord Himself loudly proclaimed before the angels and men, revealing not only their known works, but also the radiance in the recesses of their hearts. How He represented hospitable Abraham as an intimate servant, and after the promise he had received, related to him what was to befall Sodom. Similarly, He praises the good martyr Job, prior to his encounter with Satan, saying: "A perfect and upright man; one that feareth God and turneth away from evil." Moreover, He has revealed, in every religious book, the close intimacy of great Moses with God. The divine tradition has disclosed even his youthful intelligence, nor has the advice of Jethro, the foreigner, been omitted.

And thus, through divine tradition, there shine the good works of all the devout masters whose blessed names no one can completely record. And He has caused to blossom forth not only the noble deeds of those who had come before, but also of those who came after the Only Begotten Son, the Saviour of all, even crowning them with beatitudes in His luminous gospel, lauding not only His own twelve or the Forerunner, but also praising the rectitude of the faith of the others who had come nigh unto the truth of the faith. Thus concerning Nathanael He states that in him there was no guile, and the greatness of the faith of the patrician, which He says, was not to be found in Israel. Yet Christ who exalts the humble [praises] not only the greater things, but more so he [praises] the lesser ones; who thinks highly of the pouring of a little ointment and [states that] the memory of those who poured it shall be preached under heaven. He, moreover, says concerning the faith of the Canaanite woman that it was great, and the generosity of those who contributed two mites He found more praiseworthy than those of the wealthy.

As for Paul, who had determined to spread the luminous order that was established by Christ, he was designated as a chosen vessel who could bear His wondrous name in the world. Therefore, the blessed one, upon beholding the loftiness of the grace [which had been bestowed] for his faith and for that of all the saints, begins loudly to glorify [by saying] that "the grace of God which is proclaimed in everything, concerning us in Christ, and the savor of His knowledge is made manifest everywhere through us." Yet he adds even more boldly: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" And the blessed apostles had received from the Lord permission put into writing the virtues of all their co-workers. A few [of them] can be seen in the Holy Gospel, and a few others are found in the Acts, written by blessed Luke, and there are others who are better presented in the general epistles.

At the same time St. Paul tells in fourteen epistles concerning his fellow apostles and co-workers, making [them] participants in his joy, and at the end of his epistles extends greeting to each one of them, inquiring [concerning them] by name, and quotes the gospel in praise of one of them. But he is thankful not only for the assistance to the blessed one, but gives much praise for the Christian hospitality of his hosts, and pleadingly applies to God, asking recompense for their kindness. And he declares in all the synagogues the nobility of the chosen, not only of the men, but also of the women disciples who preached the truth of the gospel.

And he has declared all this not for the sake of praise or pride, but so that it may serve as an example for those who were to come later. So that they all should be zealous in good deeds, he says: "Follow after charity and desire spiritual gifts." In relating in Macedonia, of the Achaians' readiness to serve the saints, he exhorts by rousing their envy, and even permits them to be unreservedly [jealous] of the virtue of the just, by saying that, "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." He moreover, exhorts them to resemble him and the Lord.

Again, he strives to live with them all by Christ's example. "Look unto Jesus," says he, "the author and perfecter of our faith," and again, "remember them which have rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow." And finally, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Thus states also Luke at the beginning of the book of "The Acts," while beloved James, brother of Jesus, taking as his example the entire phalanx of the saints as well as the Lord, lover of the saints, states in his epistle: "Take my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering, affliction and patience. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord."

It is evident from what has been stated that praise of the God-loving chosen is from the Lord Himself, some from the angels, and some from others, not for the sake of pride, but for the purpose of arousing each other's envy, so that encouraged by each other, we may succeed in the accomplishment of good works, the goal set up by blessed Paul, "to come... unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," whose freedom is in heaven, to await The Saviour, the great God.

We have also the gracious canonic writings which came after the apostles indicating how they honored and praised one another for their true faith and evangelical life and have been similarly treated to this very day.

And thus we have from them both permission to commit to writing the life of the just man.

Therefore, that which we have promised shall hence forth be produced, to the best of our ability; the biography of the father shall be duly completed and their sweet command shall be elaborately carried out.

III.

Mashtots' was the name of the person to whom we referred at the beginning of our account, whose story we have been eager to write. He was from the district of Taron, the village of Hats'ekats, son of a blessed man named Vardan. From childhood he had been tutored in Greek literature, and coming to the court of the Arsacid kings in Greater Armenia, served in the royal secretariat, as an executor of the royal commands, during the service of one named Ar'avan as the *hazarapet* of the land of Armenia. He was well versed in secular laws, and was esteemed by his men for his mastery of the military art. While serving the princes, he, nevertheless, devoted himself eagerly to the reading of the scriptures, whereby he soon was enlightened, gaining insight and profundity in matters related to the divine commands, and adorning himself with every preparation, he served the princes.

IV.

And subsequently, in compliance with the precepts of the gospel, he devoted himself to the service of God the lover of men. Thenceforward he was divested of princely passions, and taking the exalted cross went after the all-sustaining Crucified. And in obedience to the commands of [faith], joined the crusading legion of Christ, and soon entered the monastic order. He experienced many kinds of hardships, in keeping with the precepts of the gospel. He subjected himself to all types of spiritual discipline—solitude, mountain-dwelling, hunger, thirst, and living on herbs, in dark cells, clad in sackcloth, with the floor as his bed. Often, in the twinkling of an eye, he would end in standing vigil, a night's pleasant rest and much needed sleep. And he did all this not a few times. And having found a few persons, he caused them to adhere to him, making them pupils in the same evangelical exercise.

And thus, bearing with a courageous will all the temptations that came upon him, and growing in radiance, he became known and beloved of God and men.

V.

Taking along with him his faithful pupils, the blessed one went to the disorderly and uncultivated regions of Goghtan. He was met by the ruler of Goghtan, a pious man whose name was Shabit, a gracious and hospitable man, who devoutly served him in a manner worthy of an apostle of Christian faith. And the blessed one at once exercising the art of evangelism, with the faithful cooperation of the ruler, began [to preach] in the district, and capturing them all away from their native traditions and satanic idolatry, turned them to obedience to Christ.

And as he implanted in them the word of life, there appeared many miracles that are known to all the people of the district. Evil spirits in various aspects took flight and fell in the regions of the Mark'. He resolved to have greater concern for the consolation of the people of the entire land; [therefore] he increased his moanful prayers to God with upraised hands and ceaseless tears, remembering the words of the Apostle who said: "I am sorrowful and constant in my heartache for my brethren and my kin."

He was thus surrounded and ensnared with sad worries and engulfed by waves of apprehension as to how he might find a solution to the problem.

VI.

And after being occupied with the same [problem] for many days; he rose and came to the Holy Catholicos of Greater Armenia—whose name was Sahak, and whom he found predisposed and sharing in the same concern. Cordially they came together, and with earnest prayers early every morning [besought] God that all men attain the salvation brought by Christ. And they did this many days.

Then as a boon from God the gracious, the council of blessed monks, devoted to the service of the land, gathered to secure letters for the Armenian nation. They conducted much inquiry and exploration, and much toil. Later they disclosed the foremost object of their search to the King of the Armenians whose name was Vramshapuh.

The King told them of a man named Daniel, a Syrian bishop of noble lineage, who unexpectedly had come into the possession of letters of an Armenian alphabet. And when the King told them about Daniel's discovery, they prevailed upon him to do what was needful. He then dispatched a man named Vahrij along with messages to a priest called Habel, who was an intimate of Bishop Daniel.

As for Habel, upon hearing it, he hastened to Daniel, and first became familiar, through Daniel, with the letters, then taking them from him sent them to the King in the land of Armenia. The [letters] reached his hands in the fifth year of his reign. Upon receiving the letters from Habel, the King rejoiced with Sahak and Mashtots.

Then the blessed stewards taking the unexpectedly discovered object of their search, requested of the King young children on whom they might experiment with the alphabet. And when many of them had been taught, the King commanded that everywhere the instruction be effected using those same [letters]. Thus the blessed one attained the noble rank of teacher, and taught for two years with the use of the same letters.

Yet when they became aware of the fact that those letters were insufficient to form all the syllables of the Armenian language, especially since the letters essentially proved to have been buried and then resurrected from other languages, they found themselves once more in the same anxieties and for some time were engaged in finding a solution.

VII.

Therefore, taking with him a group of young men, by authority of the King and the consent of Saint Sahak, the blessed Mashtots' took leave with a kiss of holiness, in the fifth year of King Vramshapuh's reign, and came to the region of Aram, to two Syrian cities, one of which was called Edessa, and the other, Amida. There he presented himself to two bishops, one of whom was called Babilas, and the other, Akakios. And they, clergy and nobles of the city, received the visitors with due honors and solicitude, in keeping with the custom of Christians.

The dedicated teacher then divided his pupils into two groups, assigning one group to the Syrian school in the city of Edessa, and the other to the Greek school in Samosata.

VIII.

He then resumed, with his co-workers, his usual prayerful labors, his tearful pleadings, his life of austerity, and his anxieties, remembering the word of the prophet: "In retiring and rest shalt thou live."

Thus he experienced many tribulations in order to serve his nation. And God the All-Bountiful finally granted him that good fortune; for with his holy hand he became the father of new and wonderful offsprings—letters for the Armenian language, and then and there quickly designed, named, determined, their order and devised the syllabication.

Then taking leave of the holy Bishop, he went, along with his pupils, to the city of Samosata, where he was accorded great honors by the Bishop and the Church. He found there in the same city, a Greek scribe, named Ropanos, by whose hands all the variations of the letters, thin and heavy strokes, long and short, the single letters as well as the diphthongs were devised, after which he proceeded with translations, with the help of two of his pupils: Hovhan, from the district of Ekeghiats', and Hovsep from the district of Baghnatun. And thus began the translation of the Bible, first, the Proverbs of Solomon, which begins with the exhortation to seek wisdom: "To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding," which was written also by the same scribe. At once they began to teach the youth, [training] scribes for the same task.

IX.

Then taking letters from the Bishop of the city and taking leave of them together with his followers, he came to the Syrian Bishop. He showed the alphabet to those who had received him earlier. Whereupon from the holy bishops and all the churches there rose many hymns of praise, glorifying God and offering encouragement to the students. And taking with him letters of good tidings and God's gracious gift, he set out with his group. Safely passing many hostelries, and with profound joy, he arrived in Armenia, in the regions of the district of Ayrarat, near the limits of the New City [Vagharshapat], in the sixth year of King Vramshapuh's reign.

Even Moses the Great was not as happy when he descended from Mount Sinai. We do not say that he [was happier], but that he was even much less[happy]. For as the man who had seen God descended from the mountain, holding the Commandments inscribed by God, he [was saddened] because of the sinful people: who having [turned away] from Providence, had become abject God-forsakers and were bowing down before their molten idol, to the great distress of the bearer of the Commandments, causing him to lament, as is evident from his breaking the tablets.

But the blessed one concerning whom this essay is being written did not act as had transpired there; on the contrary, filled with spiritual consolation, he was confident of the eagerness of those who were to be the recipients, and in anticipation of the joy of the recipients, the very hostelries on his road appeared as receivers of tidings.

Let no one consider us bold or what we have said. We may be subject to censure for our analogy between a very modest man and Moses the magnificent, who had spoken with God. But we feel justified in that, there is no reason to disparage, overtly or covertly that which is from God; for it is from only one omnipotent God that all graces come to earth-born men.

And thus as the unforgettable one approached the royal city, they informed the King and the holy Bishop.

And they, followed by the entire assemblage of noble courtiers and a throng, came outside the city and met the blessed one on the bank of the River Rah, and after warm greetings amidst sounds of joy and the singing of hymns and doxologies, returned to the city. And the days passed in festive joy.

X.

He then immediately obtained permission from the King to undertake [to teach] in the savage regions of the Mark' who were difficult to communicate with, not only because of their devilish, satanic, and fiendish character, but also because of their very crude, corrupt, and harsh language. Undertaking to refine them, they made them, offsprings of many generations, intelligible, eloquent, educated, and informed of godly wisdom. Thus they became immersed in the laws and commandments, to the extent of becoming distinguishable from their fellow natives.

XI.

And from then on continuing with the husbandry of God's work, they began with the evangelical art—to translate, to write, and to teach, especially since they had before their eyes the Lord's lofty commands and God's lofty Commandments which were given to blessed Moses concerning all the things that were—so as to be inscribed in a book to be preserved for the eternity to come, as well as similar commands which had been given to other prophets: "Take thee a great roll," said He, "and write in it with a scribe's pen." And elsewhere: "Now go, write it on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book." But David indicates even more clearly that the divine law shall apply to all nations, by saying, "This shall be written for the generation to come," and that "The Lord shall count when he writeth up the people," which in His coming Christ fulfilled by His gracious commandment: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations," and that "this gospel shall be preached in all the world." Thus our blessed fathers, having obtained permission, rendered their work, through hopeful endeavor, manifest and fruitful as the gospel.

At that time our blessed and wonderful land of Armenia became truly worthy of admiration, where by the hands of two colleagues, suddenly, in an instant, Moses, the law-giver, along with the order of the prophets, energetic Paul with the entire phalanx of the apostles, along with Christ's world-sustaining gospel, became Armenian-speaking.

What heart-warming joy existed there thenceforth, and what a pleasant scene for the eyes! For a land which had not known even the name of the regions where all those wonderful divine acts had been performed, soon learned all the things that were, not only those that had transpired in time, but that of the eternity which had preceded, and those that had come later, the beginning and the end and all the divine traditions.

XII.

And as they became certain that things were firmly established, they were emboldened even more in gathering more pupils for the newly discovered learning, so as to instruct, educate, and train for preaching illiterate men. On their part they arose and came in large numbers from all parts and districts of Armenia to the [newly] opened fountain of divine knowledge. For in the districts of Ayrarat at the seat of kings and patriarchs, there gushed forth for the Armenians a grace of God's commandments. Here it is needful to recall the words of the Prophet: "And there shall spring a fountain in the House of David."

And truly the [two] pillars of the Church boldly assumed the task of preaching Christ by sending to different parts and districts of Armenia their apostles of truth, [deeming] those of us who had completed their training as qualified to teach others. To them they offered their own labors as examples and guide rules, bidding them to stay within those rules.

And by their God-given wisdom they instructed nearby the royal court together with the entire *azatagund banak* ["army"]. Moreover, blessed Sahak instructed especially the men of the Mamikonians, foremost of whom was named Vardan, who was also called Vardkan. Likewise he strove to instruct everyone and to impart the knowledge of the truth.

XIII.

After this the blessed Mashtots' obtained permission so that while the Lord Bishop disseminated the word of life among the royal garrisons, he himself would do likewise in the pagan areas. And he took leave of them with his assistants, the first one of whom was named Tirayr from the Xordzenakan [Xordzean] district, and that of the second, Mushe', from the district of Taron, who were both saintly, energetic men, as well as other servants of the gospel whom I am unable to designate by name. Together with them, trusting in God's grace, the blessed one arrived in Rotastak in Goght'n, his first parish. And expounding the doctrine in his usual manner, in company with the pious Shabit, he filled the district with the message of Christ's gospel, and in all the towns of the district he established orders of monks. He was soon joined by Git, son of the Christ-loving Shabit, who followed in his father's footsteps, and rendered much service to the *vardapet* in the manner of a true son.

XIV.

After this he went to the neighboring land of Siwnik. Here too he was received with godly amenities by the ruler of Siwnik whose name was Vaghinak. From him [Mashtots'] obtained much assistance in his assumed task, enabling him to visit and to familiarize himself with all parts of Siwnik. And so as to teach he gathered youths from the more brutal, barbaric, and fiendish regions and cared for them and instructed as a teacher, educated and advised them so well as to ordain a bishop overseer from among those barbarians, whose name was Ananias, a saintly, distinguished man, and a father for the seminarians. He then filled the region of Siwnik with monastic orders.

At that time God ordained that brave Vasak Siwni, a wise and ingenious, far-sighted man, endowed with the grace of divine knowledge, came to be the ruler of Siwnik. He greatly assisted in the work of the evangelization. He showed obedience, as a son to his father, and duly serving the gospel, carried out all his requests.

XV.

Again, after the passage of some time, the beloved of Christ thought of taking care of the barbarian regions, and by the grace of God undertook to create an alphabet for the Georgian language. He wrote, arranged, and put it in order, and taking a few of his pupils, arrived in the regions of Georgia. And he went and presented himself to King Bakur, and the bishop of the land, Moses.

He placed his skill at their disposal, advised and urged them, and they consented to do what he requested. And he found a Georgian translator by the name of Jagha, a literate and devout man. The Georgian king then ordered that youths be gathered from various parts and districts of his realm and brought to the *vardapet*. Taking them he put them through the forge of education, and with spiritual love and energy he removed [from them] the purulent uncleanness of the worship of spirits and false idols, and he separated and purged them from their native [traditions], and made them lose their recollection to such an extent that they said, "I forgot my people and my father's house."

And thus they who had been gathered from among so many distinct and dissimilar tongues, he bound together with one [set of] divine commandments, transforming them into one nation and glorifiers of one God. There were found among them men worthy of attaining the order of bishop, first among whom was a saintly and devout man by the name of Samuel, who became the Bishop of the royal court.

And when he had organized the work of God's worship in all parts of Georgia, taking leave of them he returned to Armenia, and meeting Sahak, the Catholicos of the Armenians, recounted all that had transpired [and] together they glorified God and the exalted Christ.

XVI.

And then he came back to visit the places he had organized and the districts in Armenia that had been taught, in order to revitalize, renovate, and confirm. And when he had filled every place with the holy gospel of the Lord, admonishing them all to walk in the path of life, he then thought of the other half of the Armenian nation which was under the rule of the king of the Romans [Byzantines].

And he hastened and went with many pupils to the region of the Greeks, and owing to the renown for his good works which had reached there long before, from the northern regions, he received at the very outset of his journey a very sincere and amicable reception from the bishops and princes and provincials of the land, especially from the commander-in-chief [*sparapet*] of the area whose name was Anatolis, who transmitted in writing [Mesrop's] design to the emperor, whose name was Theodosius, son of Arcadius, from whom there came an order to accord due honors to the Saint, who was to be called *acoemeti*.

And he took the group of his pupils to Melitene and left them in the care of the saintly Bishop of the city whose name was Akakios, and [he] named as their supervisor one called Leontius, a loyal and pious man. And then the

blessed one taking with him the excellent Bishop of Derjan, whose name was Gint, and a few of his pupils there, and boarding a public transport and receiving much courtesy, arrived at the capital city of Constantinople. The court was immediately informed of him, and he entered into the presence of the exalted throne, the God ordained monarchs and to the Patriarch and saintly Catholicos of the royal city, whose name was Atticus, and was well received. It was ordered that [Mesrop] be honored in the capital city for a definite period with the same living accommodations accorded to the Church, the court, and the excellent nobles of the city.

And after the passage of Easter, he explained to the emperor the nature of his needs, and obtained unassailable authorization, along with a *sacra rescripta* bearing the emperor's seal, to gather youths from their half of the Armenian nation for the purpose of instruction, concerning the Borboritons, evil doing men, and the preservation of the Church, as well as to be honored with valuable gifts. The virtuous one, however, having prevailed upon the court, declining the gifts, left [them]. Thereupon he made obeisance to the august [personages] of the [imperial] purple and to His Holiness the Catholicos, and having been bid god-speed by the Church and the foremost princes of the city, they boarded the litters and carriages provided by the court, and with much pomp and circumstance took the royal road. And they were met at every city, and were treated as high dignitaries in every city.

And having received many gifts, they finally arrived at the appointed places. At once they visited the *sparapet* of Armenia, and presented themselves [armed with] the emperor's *sacra rescripta*. And when he received the *sacra rescripta* bearing the emperor's seal, he hastened to carry out the command at once. He therefore dispatched messengers to the districts in the half of the Armenian nation to have many youths gathered and to have provisions made for their maintenance at suitable places, where the blessed one resumed his teaching, educating those who had been gathered. Then he undertook to examine the uncouth and stubborn sect of the Borboritons. And when he found no other way to rectify them, he began to use the misery-inflicting stick, with very severe chastisements, imprisonments, tortures, fetters. And when even then they remained deprived of salvation, scourged, branded smeared in soot, and subjected to various indignities, they were driven out of the land.

However, the blessed one devoted himself to his educational task, organized and completed it. And having acquired many a noble book by the church fathers, he further deepened his knowledge of the doctrine and was filled with all goodness.

Then there came and visited them an elderly man, an Aghuanian named Benjamin. And he [Mesrop] inquired and examined the barbaric diction of the Aghuanian language, and then through his usual God-given keenness of mind invented an alphabet, which he, through the grace of Christ, successfully organized and put in order.

After this he separated from the bishops, the princes of the land, and all the churches. He appointed two of his pupils, the first one of whom was called, Yenovk, and the second Danan, as overseers for the faithful, clerics, effective men in the evangelical service, whom he commended to God and placed them there. And along with many pupils he came to the regions of Greater Armenia, and arriving at Nor Kaghak [Vagharshapat] presented himself to the saintly bishop, Sahak, and to the Armenian King whose name was Artashes, and to the nobles, and related to them the things wrought by the Grace of God in those regions, and remained there a few days to distribute spiritual consolation.

XVII.

And then he bid farewell to them in order to go to the region of the Aghuanians and arrived in their country, and upon reaching the royal regions, he saw the saintly Bishop of the Aghuanians whose name was Jeremiah, and their King, whose name was Arsvagh, who along with the nobility received [him] in the name of Christ with utter compliance. And then they inquired and he explained the reason for his coming. And they, the two associates, the King and the Bishop, expressed their readiness to adopt the letters and ordered that a large number of youths be gathered from districts and places in the realm and to open schools in suitable places to make provisions for their livelihood.

And when this order was actually fulfilled and bore results, Bishop Jeremiah soon began the translation of the divine books, whereby at once in one instant, the barbaric, slothful, and brutal men become well acquainted with

the prophets and the apostles, becoming heirs to the gospel, and in no way ignorant of the divine traditions. Moreover, the God-fearing King of the Aghuanians promptly commanded the satanic and devil worshipping nation to withdraw and to free itself from the old superstitions and to submit to the sweet yoke of Christ.

And when they had accomplished it and had done all that was needed and that which he wanted, he was aided in his sacred task of indoctrination, in the region of Baghas, by the saintly Bishop whose name was Mushegh. He then took leave of the Aghuanian King, the Bishop, and the Church.

And he named a few of his pupils as overseers over them along with one of the royal priests whose name was Jonathan, who had shown much eagerness for his instruction. And committing them and himself to God's providential mercy, he resumed his journey from the regions of Aghuania to the land of Georgia.

XVIII.

He arrived opposite to the Gardmanian valley. He was met by the ruler of Gardmank' whose name was Khurs, who with God-loving piety welcomed him and placed himself along with his office at the service of the *vardapet*. After enjoying the richness and essence of his doctrine, he helped the blessed one to get on his way while he set out towards his destination.

At that time [one] by the name of Ardzewgh [Arch'il, 411-435] became king of Georgia and caused learning to progress and flourish, and he visited all the pupils and exhorted them to remain in righteousness.

At that time the ruler of Tashir, an excellent God-loving man, whose name was Ashusha, placed himself along with his entire district at his disposal, and the dissemination of his doctrine was no less successful than in other districts.

And leaving them in the care of the aforementioned saintly Bishop Samuel, he returned to the regions of Greater Armenia. Coming to the usual places he warmly greeted Saint Sahak and all those whom he saw, and related to them also of those new endeavors. Upon hearing him they praised God for [His] bounties.

XIX.

Then the blessed ones turned their attention to the improvement and refinement of the literature of their nation. Sahak the Great, as before, began to write and to translate.

And it so happened that they dispatched two brothers from among their pupils to the city of Edessa in the region of the [Syrians] the first was Hovsep, as mentioned above, and the second, named Eznik, from the village of Goghob in the district of Ayrarat, for the purpose of translating and writing down the traditions of the church fathers from Syriac to Armenian.

The translators, therefore, upon arriving at their destination, carried out their orders and sent [the translations] to the excellent fathers. Then they went to the region of the Greeks where they studied and became proficient translators from the Greek language. After a while a few brethren came to the region of the Greeks, the name of the first one of which was Ghevondes, and the second, was I, Koriwn. And as they approached Constantinople they joined Eznik, and as most intimate companions, together they performed their spiritual tasks. Then they came to the land of Armenia, having brought authentic copies of the God-given book and many subsequent traditions of the worthy church fathers, along with the canons of Nicaea and Ephesus, and placed before the fathers the testaments of the Holy Church which they had brought with them.

Yet blessed Sahak, who had rendered from the Greek language into Armenian all the ecclesiastical books and the wisdom of the church fathers, once more undertook, with Eznik, the comparison of the former random, hurriedly done translations from then available copies with the authentic copies, and they translated many commentaries of the Bible.

And thus the fathers passed their time, day and night, with the reading of books, and thus served as good examples to their studious assistants, especially in keeping with the commandments from God's messengers, the first of whom has commended: "On His laws shalt thou meditate day and night," and the second which similarly commands: "And give attendance to reading, exhortation, and to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in them..... Meditate upon the things, giving thyself wholly to them... for doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee."

XX.

Then the blessed Mashtots' with his excellent erudition began to prepare diverse, easily understood and gracious sermons, full of the light and essence of the prophetic books and illustrations of true evangelical faith. He then [created] and organized many examples and allusions from ephemeral things of the world related to after-life, resurrection, and hope, so as to make them intelligible even to fools and to those distracted by secular things, to revive, to awaken; and to convince them of the rewards that have been promised.

XXI.

And thus all over Armenia, Georgia, and Aghuania, throughout his lifetime, in summer and winter, night and day, fearless and without hesitation, he bore, with his evangelical and upright life, the name of Jesus the Saviour of all, before kings, princes, and all the pagans, and with no contradiction from opponents. And he adorned every man spiritually with the vestments of Christ, and he saved many who had been imprisoned and in chains, by wresting them away from the hands of tyrants by the mighty power of Christ, and he tore up many inequitable contracts and through the doctrine of consolation gave to many who were in mourning and in despair, expectation and hope in the appearance of the glory of Almighty God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and in general he changed them all by bringing them under God's law.

XXII.

And again he established many and countless groups of monks in inhabited as well as in uninhabited places, countless groups in lowlands, in mountains, in caves, and in cloisters. From time to time he showed himself as an example to them. From all the monasteries he took with him a few pupils to retire into the mountains and to live in caves. They secluded themselves in caverns and ended the day by receiving their daily nourishment from herbs. And thus they subjected themselves to painful weakness, having especially in view the consolation of the apostolic word: "When I am weak for Christ, I am strong," as well as, "It is better that I glory in my infirmities so that the power of Christ may rest in me." There they did not become drunk with wine, but were filled with the spirit and their hearts were ever ready to praise with hymns the glory of God.

There they received training by reading spiritually instructive books. There the master instructed and exhorted the chosen to go forward to attain the crown offered by Christ. There they were fired with God-worshipping service. There they prayed tearfully and beseeched God, the lover of mankind, for the reconciliation of the life of all [men].

And thus he performed his spiritual art for many days in desolate places until he received word from the priests of the region to come to their assistance for any worthy purpose in the grace of Christ. And he without hesitation hurried with his assistants [to investigate] whatever happened to be the problem, and through the power of God solved it, and with ceaseless speech, he caused the streams of the doctrine to flow abundantly in the hearts of his hearers.

And he did this throughout his lifetime for himself and for the world. For all true teachers earnestly strive to render their virtues as examples for their pupils, especially stressing that of the Lord, the only wise God. "For Jesus began to work and to teach." He often took His disciples aside, and made His all powerful person an example to imperfect men, when on Mount Tabor He pronounced the Beatitudes and offered on the same mountain the canonical prayer, while His disciples sailed on the Sea of Tiberias. And, again, during the feast of the unleavened bread, having secluded himself on the Mount of Olives, He offered His prayer of the night. Thus

it is evident without the need of scrutiny that the Lord of All strove not for Himself, but to teach the world, as an example for all who obey, and for that reason said, "watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

And if earthen man is deficient in the knowledge of the minor arts, how much more lacking may he be considered in the art which enables him to speak with God? Thus blessed Paul states that all are ignorant; therefore, the omniscient spirit comes to their aid and intercedes for them "with groanings that cannot be uttered."

Yet when we hear that "Jesus began to work and to teach," it should be understood that He worked and taught and not as though He made a present [of the knowledge]. And the intercession of the saints and the intercession of the Holy Spirit was for the purpose of teaching us, and is to be understood as intercession for one another, for Godhood is not of varying but of equal [rank].

While the blessed apostles, having received the example from the teacher of truth, first applied it to their imperfect selves, and then transmitted it to their disciples. They greatly exalted the glory of Christ, sometimes in private, and sometimes by gathering the people together. For in reality it is far more useful to retreat from all worldly interests, to withdraw one's self and to engage only in the worship of God, as had done the prophets who in the mountains and deserts and in caverns had devoted themselves to the service of the divine faith.

Similarly, all the church fathers who came after the order of the disciples, endowed as they were with piety, served as examples to us who have followed them. Thus the blessed one had assumed this honored tradition, and similarly admonished all who came near him with the same exhortation. And it was thus that they lived a long time, richly filled by the grace of divine gifts, rising early in the morning for the same purpose, daily, with perseveranee.

XXIII.

At that time there was brought to the land of Armenia the false books and inane traditions of a man named Theodore [of Mopsuestia]. Synodical fathers of the church had informed Sahak and Mashtots', the faithful glorifiers [of God], concerning it in writing; and the latter, in the interest of truth, destroyed and sent them beyond their borders, so that no satanic smoke might contaminate the luminous doctrine.

XXIV.

After that the blessed Sahak, righteous to the end, full in the number of years and gracious with the goodness of God-given bounties, on the first year of Yazdigird [II, 438-457], son of Vram, the King of Persia, in the district of Bagrevand and village of Blrots'ats', at the end of the month of Navasard, even as they had been commemorating the birthday of the blessed one, at the hour of two, in the course of the administration of extreme unction with prayers pleasing to God, expired in Christ, as spoken by the prophet, "Into thine hand commit I my spirit," and as the blessed Stephan said, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." He, moreover, committed to God those he left behind.

Hastily making all preparations, his God-loving officers, his own pupils, the chief of whom was called Yeremia, a saintly and devout man, who with the assistance of noble lady named Douster, the wife of Vardan, whom we have mentioned before, as well as a large group of saintly men, raised him with psalms, doxologies, and hymns, and going day and night for several days, arrived in Taron, at the very village of Ashtishat. And there, at the altar of All the Martyrs, placed him with sweet-smelling incense of all kinds in the sarcophagus of the saints, and sealed it with the seal of Christ, and after performing the customary rites, everyone returned to this place every year coming together at that month, they observed his memory.

XXV.

But his blessed colleague, by this I mean Mashtots, seared with yearning, was immersed in sad, tearful, and heartfelt lamentations, and deep mourning. For if the holy Apostle upon not finding his co-worker, Timothy, says that his soul was restless, how much more sorrow is experienced over those who are forever departed, by those

who are left behind? Even though the sorrow caused by loneliness would not permit cheerfulness, yet he continued with the grace of God, faultlessly, his evangelism and administration of the Holy Church and strove even more and exhorted everyone to be undaunted in goodness. And day and night, with fasting and praying and with supplications, and in loud voice admonished everyone, reminding them of the God-ordained commandments, and performed some of the most arduous disciplines [of monastic life]. Above all, owing to his advanced age, thinking of his last days, he would not allow his eyes to be overcome with sleep nor his eyelids with somnolence, until he attained rest in the Lord.

XXVI.

And while he thus revived the religious fervor of those who were near him, and sent many messages of advice and exhortation to all the provinces, the same year, six months after the death of blessed Sahak, the Armenian army being located, along with the saintly master, in Nor Kaghak [Vagharshapat] in Ayrarat, with the same godly life he reached the saintly end of those who have been summoned by Christ. And after an illness of a few days, on the 13th day of the month of Mehekan, as was about to become separated from his beloved pupils to join Christ's legion, freed from his pains and regaining consciousness, he arose and sat in the midst of those around him, and with hands upraised to heaven, he surrendered to God's grace those who remained, and asked assistance of them.

And the names of the principal disciples who had gathered [there] are, first, Hovsep, whom we have mentioned at the beginning; second, Tadik, a temperate man, most heedful to the directions of the master. Among the military, the name of the first one, Vahan, of the Amatuni clan, who was the commander in chief of Greater Armenia, and that of the second, Hmayeak, of the Mamikonian clan, excellent and pious men, heedful to the master's instructions.

And as the hands of the saint were upraised to heaven, there was seen a luminous vision resembling a cross over the dwelling where the blessed one was dying. This was seen by everyone with his own eyes, and was not related by acquaintances. And he passed on to the saints love and unity as a legacy, blessed them that were far and near, and went to his rest, offering prayers pleasing to Christ.

Vahan and Hmayeak, along with the populace, lifted the deceased, having made all arrangements, with psalms and doxologies and spiritual joy, with burning candles and flaming torches, sweet-smelling incense, and brilliant candlesticks, preceded by luminous crucifixes, went up to Oshakan and laid him there in the place of the Martyrs and performed the funeral rites. Then the vision disappeared, and they all returned to their places.

However, three years later Vahan Amatuni was able to build, with Christ-loving zeal, a marvelous church with finely hewn, sculptured stones, and inside the church built the Saint's tomb. For the altar of the life-giving body and blood of Christ, he prepared graceful vessels of varied colors, decorated with shining gold, silver, and precious stones. And together with the assembled monks, he transferred the body of Mashtots', the witness for Christ's religion of the cross, to the sarcophagus in the church. And for the glory of God they appointed one of his pupils named Tadik, a temperate and pious man, along with brethren, as servants of the Saint who had attained the state of bliss.

XXVII.

The principals, administrators, and vicars had been named by the departed church fathers. The first of these was Hovsep, chief of the council, and the second, another pupil named Hovhan, a truly saintly, truth-loving man. It so happened that, after the passing of the Saint, this man victoriously withstood for Christ many and varied torments and sorrows in chains at Ctesiphon in a singlehanded combat against redoubled tyranny, and thereby inherited the designation of confessor, and returned to his administrative task in Armenia.

As for the beneficent Vahan, who rendered unexpected assistance to all, through the grace of Christ our God, becoming a true spiritual son of the world-reforming fathers, was worthy of being a close participant in their life.

XXVIII.

And the fathers went to their reward as we have written. We did not record them by gleaning them from old tales; on the contrary, we witnessed their countenances, as assistants in [their] spiritual endeavors, were hearers of their gracious teaching, and were their co-workers as per the dictum of the Gospel. We have done this for my father, not by resort to false eloquence, but we wrote [this] concise work by leaving out much and by gathering from all best informed people, [facts] which are known not only to us but to those who have read this book. For we could not record in detail all the things that they each of them had done, but sufficed by this easier apostolic Acts. We set aside a multitude of the acts of the saints, so as to relate in detail the most important events. And we related this not for the glory of the saints of God who already have been honored for their most luminous faith and life, but as an inspiring example to their spiritual sons and to all who, through them, will be taught from generation to generation.

XXIX.

And thus the blessed one's years of faith [*i.e.*, as a priest] were forty-five, and the period from the creation of the Armenian alphabet to his death, thirty-five years, which is computed as follows: The Persian king Krman [Bahram IV] reigned six years and Yazdigird, twenty-one years, [and Vram eighteen years], and the Saint died in the first year of Vram's son, Yazdigird II.

Thus, the years of [service] in the holy faith began on the fourth year of King Krman up to the first year of Vram's son Yazdigird II, and the Armenian alphabet was created on the eighth year of Yazdigird [I].

Glory be to Christ, the lover of humanity.

Alphabets Created by Mashtots'

Armenian/Georgian

Armenian	Georgian		Armenian	Georgian	
Ա ա	ა	a	Մ մ	მ	m
Բ բ	ბ	b	Յ յ	[o]	y
Գ գ	გ	g	Ն ն	ნ	n
Դ դ	დ	d	Շ շ	შ	š
Ե ե	ე	e	Ո ո	ო	o
Զ զ	ზ	z	Չ չ	ჩ	č
Է է	[e]	ē	Պ պ	პ	p
Ը ը	< 2 >	ə	Ջ ճ	ჯ	ǰ
Թ թ	თ	t'	Խ ხ	ხ	i
Ժ ժ	ჯ	z	Ս ս	ს	s
Ի ի	ი	i	Վ վ	ვ	v
Լ լ	ლ	l	Տ տ	ტ	t
Խ խ	ხ	x	Ր რ	რ	r
Ծ ծ	წ	c	Յ ջ	უ	ç
Կ կ	კ	k	ՈՒ ու	უ	w
Հ հ	ჰ	h	Փ փ	ფ	p'
Ջ ձ	ძ	j	Բ բ	ბ	k'
Ղ ղ	წ	ł	Օ օ	ო	o
Ճ ճ	ჭ	č	Ծ ֆ	(ფ)	f
			ԵՒ և	(e)ევ	yev

Aghuanian

 a	 b	 (g)	 (d)	 (e)	 z	 e ₂
 3	 th	 tɕ	 j	 3 ₂	 i	 ɟ
 l	 l ₂	 x	 d ₂	 tɕ ₂	 z ₂	 k
 l	 h	 h ₂	 a ₂	 tsh ₂	 tɕ ₃	 tɕh
 m	 k ₂	 n	 ɣ	 ɟ ₂	 ɣ ₂	 o
 t	 x ₂	 dz	 tɕh ₂	 p	 ɣ	 (r)
 s	 v	 t ₂	 s ₂	 i ₃	 ts	 tsh
 w	 ph	 kh				

P R E F A C E

By Prof. Manouk Abeghian

(abridged)

This year, February 7, 1940, was the fifteen hundredth anniversary of the death of Mesrop Mashtots.

We do not have one word in Armenian inscribed either on stone or in books before the fifth century. The first person who concerned himself with Armenian letters and literature was Mesrop Mashtots. The economic-political conditions of the time had given rise to the imperative need for letters and literature, and, of course, Mashtots was not alone in this task; he was assisted by Catholicos Sahak, King Vramshapouh, and the pupils of Mashtots and Sahak.

Since the year 387 Armenia Major had been divided between two great neighboring states—the Roman Empire and the Sassanid Kingdom of Persia. In the eastern half, which constituted the larger portion of the country, the Arsacid dynasty of Armenia still continued under the suzerainty of the king of kings. There the Persian monarchs strove to introduce the Zoroastrian religion. Moreover, Syriac was the language used in the Armenian churches and schools, even though it was incomprehensible to the people, and the Syrian bishops endeavored to attain the leadership of the Armenian Church. Thus

the interests of the Church and of the Catholicate were threatened on both sides. It was necessary to strengthen Christianity so as to prevent the Chief Magus and the magi* from taking over the incomes and properties of the Church, especially of the Catholicate, which were considerable. It was moreover imperative to put an end to the encroachments by the Syrian bishops.

The use of Syriac presented a great impediment to the spread of Christianity among the masses, while it served to make the Syrian influence predominant. In order to bring to a successful head the struggle against the magi and the Syrian bishops there was felt a pressing need for Armenian letters and literature, Armenian-language schools, and rituals in Armenian. This was the state of affairs in the Persian section of Armenia.

A similar situation and problem existed for the Armenian clergy in the Roman, or as was then called, the "Greek" section of Armenia. There the Greek language predominated, and incessant were the encroachments of the Greek bishops. Moreover, owing to the political division, the eventual division of the Armenian Church was an ever present danger. In order to neutralize the Greek influence, here too it was necessary to create literature and schools, as well as church rituals in Armenian, so as to preserve the unity of the Church under the authority of one catholicate.

The Arsacid Dynasty which had reigned in Armenia since the year 66 A.D. already had lost its sway over Western Armenia, while its throne in the east was insecure. The protection of Rome against the Persians was no more, nor could the Arsacid kings rely on the loyalty of the Armenian nobles who, with few exceptions, were playthings in the hand of the Persian king of kings. Of

* Zoroastrian priests.

the internal sources of strength there remained only the Church, the Catholicate, to support the royal house. The interests of the latter also required the strengthening of Christianity and of the Church. Thus Mashtots was assisted not only by Catholicos Sahak, the last male heir of the family of St. Gregory the Illuminator, but also by King Vramshapouh, who proved of great assistance in their project, providing both counsel and the necessary funds.

Yet Mashtots was the first in that undertaking. His contemporaries have given him the first honor, and rightly so. He invented the letters, made translations, opened schools in various sections of the country, taught, established monasteries, wrote sermons and epistles. He was also concerned over the Georgians and Albanians who were bound to the Armenians and were in the same circumstances. He preached Christianity in the pagan sections of Armenia. He crossed over to Western Armenia, where encountering opposition to his work, he even felt obliged to go to Constantinople to present himself to the Emperor and prevailed on him to permit the use of the Armenian language in Armenian Churches and schools.

Mashtots has shown an amazingly energetic activity, accomplishing within a short time a tremendous cultural task with the help of his assistants, and what is most noteworthy, training assistants and pupils to carry on the work. Thus despite the difficult social and political circumstances of the time and the succeeding periods, his work has continued and progressed century after century. There has developed a literature in Armenian which has become a mighty historical, cultural medium for a people subject to various foreign rulers. Koriun Vardapet's work is the most reliable source of the initial phase of this important development.

When Was the Book Written?

Koriun Vardapet was a pupil of Mesrop Mashtots. After the death of his master he thought of writing on the origin of the Armenian alphabet and the biography of its inventor. To do this he had received the authorization of Hovsep—a disciple of Mashtots, who was then serving as Acting Catholicos—and had received encouragement from the other pupils of Mashtots.

And Koriun wrote a laudatory biography in which he did not forget the others who had worked for Armenian literature. His book is the first original historic work in Armenian letters and rightfully has been dedicated to those very letters and to their creator.

The exact date in which this work by Koriun was written is unknown. It was written some time between 443 and 451. The Acting Catholicos who directed Koriun to write the biography of Mashtots was taken to Persia, a little after the Battle of Avarair (451), and there martyred for Christianity. If it was written after the year 451, Koriun hardly would have given such glowing praise to Vasak Siuni, the traitor prince, who in the course of the Battle of Avarair had gone over to the Persian side. He would not have described him as the “brave Sisakan Vasak, a man wise, gracious, and farseeing, a man endowed with the divine grace of wisdom” (Section XIV). On the other hand, the work could not have been written immediately after the death of Mashtots, since it states concerning Sahak: “Coming together year after year at the same month, they observed his memory” (Section XXIV). The commemoration must have been held for three or four years after Sahak’s death (439) to justify that statement, that is, 443. Yet he writes that three years after the death of Mashtots, that is in 443, Vahan Amatuni had a church built on the grave of Mashtots. Even if

Koriun had begun to write his book earlier than that date, he could not have finished it before 443.

This is the true date of the writing of Koriun's work. Here I see the need to recall that towards the latter part of the 19th century some philologists, who infected by a common mania, began to move the time of our ancient authors closer to our period, often without proof, merely relying on words. Koriun could not escape treatment at the hands of such people, primarily because of their faulty understanding of the text.

Koriun the Man

We have a few biographical facts concerning Koriun only from his book. He had, as he states in his introduction, the good fortune of having been a special pupil of Mashtots—was the youngest among them.

Towards the end of his book he states that he was an eye-witness to the things he has recounted and had served as an assistant in the endeavors of Mashtots and Sahak, and had been a "satellite," that is, a personal aide. He wrote not only what he himself knew, but also gleaned facts from well-informed notables.

In his story he has referred to himself twice. When the pupils who had been gathered at Vagharshapat from various parts of Armenia had completed their training, they were sent in groups to the provinces so as to teach others. Koriun says that he was one of those who were thus sent. He says: ". . . they began to send in groups to different parts and provinces those who had completed their training and were qualified to teach others." (Section XII).

Elsewhere (Section XIX) he relates that several clerical "brothers" went to Constantinople. The first one of them was Ghevondes, the second, Koriun, himself, who

came and joined Eznik, as a most intimate "brother." After the performance of "the spiritual task" in Constantinople, that is, after making translations, they returned, bringing along with them manuscripts among which were the canons of the Council of Ephesus. That Council was held in the year 431. Thus Koriun and his comrades could not have returned sooner than 431.

We have no other facts concerning Koriun. Subsequently he was referred to as "the beloved man, Koriun," "Koriun, the spiritual man," "blessed man, Koriun," "Koriun, the blessed," "Koriun, the wonderful man," and even "Koriun, the saint!" These testimonies indicate that he had left a good name.

As a *Vardapet* doubtless Koriun had been engaged in teaching and preaching, as had his master, Mashtots, as well as in making translations. He has perhaps written books, but there are no known works which bear his name, with the exception of the story of "The Life and Death of Mashtots."

The Significance of the Book

What is the value of Koriun's book?

Before making an evaluation of a literary work of this kind it is necessary first to consider the author's plan, that is, what he has wanted to write and the time of the writing. Koriun reveals from the outset that he had been thinking of writing "concerning the Armenian alphabet, when and in what time, and through what kind of man that new divine gift had been bestowed, as well as on the luminous learning and angelic virtuous piety of that person." Since he had decided upon this plan, which had not included the writing of a history of the Armenians, we naturally cannot expect other things from him. He has accomplished that which he had planned.

It is laughable that towards the end of the nineteenth century a man living in Europe* had mocked our author by saying that Koriun "having deemed the writing of a biography of Mashtots beyond his capacities, has hastened to ask for the prayers of his colleagues, as if writing something a few pages long was beyond human capacity and in need of divine grace."

But in ancient times that is how others, such as Ghazar Pharpetsi, thought and acted. It was an expression of the religious spirit of the times. On the other hand, it was an expression of modesty relative to the Acting Catholicos, Hovsep, a pupil of Mashtots, who held high office.

Yet he also requests the prayers of his comrades who had asked him to write the life of Mesrop, "so that I may successfully sail over the boundless waves of the sea of doctrine."

This is not a mere statement of courtesy or an expression in keeping with the religious spirit of the times, whereby everything was done through divine grace. There is another facet:

It must be borne in mind that Koriun had studied and worked in Constantinople at a time when great theological controversies were going on and there took place the Council of Ephesus against the Nestorians. Along with his fellow students he had brought the canons of the Council of Nicea, and he himself has related that Sahak and Mashtots struggled against sects such as the Borboritons and Theodore Mopsuestia, the teacher of Nestorius, who had penetrated into Armenia. Under these circumstances, he, as a devout person, was likely to turn to the divine mercy "so as to sail unerringly over the boundless waves of the sea of doctrine."

After the first concise introduction the biographer of

* Norair Puzantatzi

Mashtots has written a second strong and lengthy introduction (Section II) in order to answer the question whether or not it is permissible to write a biography of a "perfect man."

Through the introduction of a great many quotations from the Bible, he has shown that it is not only permissible, but essential so as to serve as an example to others. Subsequently, he concludes that he too could be bold enough to write the biography of a "saintly man."

For a second time our author has brought many quotations from the Bible in the section where he tells that "they began to translate and to teach."

By this he has striven to show that our blessed fathers had had permission to do so not only from the prophets but from Jesus himself. (Section XI).

And for a third time our author brings many quotations from the Bible as he speaks of the ecclesiastical, monastic, and missionary work of Mashtots. He has done this in order to magnify his master, to show that he had been not only a follower of the apostles but of Jesus himself (Section XII).

Why all these?

To criticize by saying that the second section in question was too long, that it was superfluous, or that it was done "in amazing piety" and that the quotations from the Bible are worthless—all these indicate inability to understand Koriun and his time.

He as well as the other pupils of Mashtots who had been thinking of writing the life of their master knew quite well that it was permissible to do so. Having made translations for a long time, they were aware that they were permitted to write in Armenian. They were familiar with the life of Mashtots as well as with the quotations from the Bible introduced by Koriun. All these were not

for them nor for us and our contemporaries. It was addressed to the opponents of Mashtots and his pupils.

Through his great prestige as a hermit and apostle, Mashtots could contain his opponents and did contain them. He carried with his evangelic and upright life the name of Jesus the Saviour of all before Kings, princes, and all the pagans, and with no contradiction from his adversaries. But now those opponents had raised their heads and their struggle against the new generation, trained through the efforts of Sahak and Mesrop, had been quite evident even towards the latter part of the fifth century.

From this point of view Koriun's second section and his numerous citations assume an importance also for us in the matter of picturing the spirit of the times.

Such a totally new work, the biography of Mashtots, might have opened the door to gossip, not only on the part of opponents, but generally by ignorant men, since every novelty is unacceptable to those who do not understand.

The Armenian Kingdom was then no more. The Persian suzerainty had greatly strengthened the influence of the Syrian clergy in Armenia. During the 430's Catholicos Sahak had been deprived of his ecclesiastical throne and there even reigned Syrian catholici. The work of translation conducted by Sahak and Mesrop and their pupils thus was directed against the Syrian influence and Syriac language. Under these circumstances, it can be readily understood why Koriun has written such a long introduction full of Biblical quotations to prove that it was permissible to write the life of Mashtots, devoting greater attention to Mesrob's life as an anchorite and evangelist, which had been recognized also by the Syrian bishops as well as by those on the side of Byzantium, and which the opponents could not deny. If he exalted Mash-

tots as a clergyman, it was not a matter of a pupil's indulgence in hero-worship, but an effort to silence opponents.

Koriun has not made reference to the political and religious affairs of the time. He does not have even one word to the effect that the language then used in the Armenian Church had been Syriac, that they taught Syriac in the schools, and that, thanks to Sahak and Mashtots, Syriac was changed to Armenian. As a rule he is careful not to use the name "Syriac," only with two exceptions: one in reference to the Armenian alphabet in the possession of the Syrian bishop Daniel, as if to show to the Syrian bishops of Armenia that even before Mashtots a Syrian bishop had thought of Armenian letters. And the other, relative to the reception and the honors accorded and the solicitude shown to Mashtots and his men by the bishops of Edessa and Amit, indicating that they were happy over the creation of Armenian letters and literature, as if to say, if those celebrated Syrian bishops, Rabulas and Akakios, had shown such regard for Armenian letters, the Syrian bishops in Armenia should do likewise.

That my point of view is correct is evident even from Koriun's following words which have not been given the necessary attention. In the epilogue of his book (Section XX) Koriun reveals that "by leaving much out, we wrote this concise work." Whereupon he explains, "For we could not record in detail all the things that they each of them had done, but we sufficed by this easier *Acts of the Apostles*, having set aside a multitude of other acts of the saints, so as to relate in detail the most important events."

Of course, Koriun was not trained to write a biography or history. His training had been essentially ecclesiastical.

He had been occupied with the translation of various canonic writings and had a good knowledge of the Bible. Nevertheless, it is not possible to say that his small book does not have great value. On the contrary, in the matter of becoming acquainted with the beginnings of the new era in Armenian history, it had, and still has, a very great value. Suffice it to say that were it not for this book, we would have known mighty little, and that unreliable, concerning such an important event as the beginnings of the Armenian letters and literature. Subsequent writers were aided by Koriun.

Koriun has given sufficient information concerning the subject, and as a rule very clearly. Through his work we can picture a wisely planned and executed endeavor, and the principal actor, Mashtots, is revealed as one possessing an inexhaustible energy, a gracious and influential man, who thought of and had solicitude for not only the Armenian people but for the neighboring peoples as well, who constantly traveled and through his visits of inspection placed the work which he had begun on a firm foundation.

Of course Koriun and all other ancient authors could not possibly give satisfaction to the questions of inquisitive men, such as: how many of the letters Mashtots invented? 36? 14? or 7? Did the Armenians have the use of letters before Christianity? Could it be that the Danielian alphabet was the ancient alphabet of the Armenians that had become forgotten, becoming replaced by foreign literature, that is, foreign letters, and being later discovered? Which ones were the Danielian letters, and by what letters did Mashtots complete them? As if Koriun were obliged to foretell what would be asked centuries later and to provide the answers beforehand!

Koriun has devoted special attention also to chro-

nology. He has stated dates which are confirmed by other sources, of course, according to the years of the kings, since the chronological system was not in use at the time. The dates which he has mentioned and repeated two or three times concern the Armenian letters, the ordination of Mashtots, the deaths of Sahak and Mesrop. Here too he has been following his projected plan. Of course, it would have been fine if he had mentioned a few other dates relative to the activities of Mashtots—if only he had known!

It is said that Koriun has not disclosed the place where Mashtots had invented the Armenian alphabet. As can be seen in Section VII, it was at Edessa. The name has dropped out of the manuscript

As a rule Koriun's work, especially the latter part, has been much distorted by the copyists. Those who have used the book have often not given this matter any attention. Koriun's style too has been a source of difficulty to us moderns. He writes with much grandiloquence encumbered with superfluous adornments and repetitions. As he himself states, he "causes to blossom." Often he is hazy. Necessary words are lacking and there are many original, newly invented compound words which stand for whole sentences that are unintelligible to us. To this we may add the partial distortion of the original manuscript, and it can be readily understood why the book has been for many persons difficult to understand.

It was also difficult to understand during the Middle Ages, giving cause for a new edition, summarized from Koriun's book and combined with various items of information from the History of Movses Khorenatsi, even substituting Koriun's statements. This is known by the name of "False Koriun."

October 30, 1940.

Resources about *The Life of Mashtots'*

[Texts and Studies](#), at Internet Archive.

[Studies of Armenian Literature \(5th-17th Centuries\)](#) at Internet Archive.

[Koriwn/Koriun](#), at Wikipedia.

[Armenian Alphabet](#), at Wikipedia.